

## Governor has the right to have his own beliefs

People protesting against religion in government have gone a bit too far this time, we think.

A group called Americans United for Separation of Church and State raised a howl when Gov. Sam Brownback appeared at a religious rally a couple of weeks ago.

"The governor is really overstepping his constitutional bounds," the group said in a release. "He was elected to serve as governor of our state, not our state pastor-in-chief."

So what exactly did the activist group object to?

According to press reports, the governor talked that day about how he turned to God after learning he had cancer in 1995.

"I finally reached up and said, 'God, this life's yours,'" the governor said. "It started a great adventure."

He ended his talk by praying for forgiveness of his sins and the sins of others.

Organizers of the ReignDown USA event denied that they wanted political leaders to enforce any kind of religious belief on the state. The event was designed to promote "humility, prayer and repentance," they said.

What really ticked Americans United off, however, apparently was a proclamation the governor issued beforehand declaring the day of the rally as "a day of restoration."

That amounted to the governor using his office to promote religion, the group said.

"The people of Kansas do not need politicians telling us when, how or whether to pray," Vickie Sandell Stangl, president of the Great Plains Chapter, said in the statement. "If any-

body needs to repent, it's Gov. Brownback. He needs to repent for violating the constitutional separation of church and state."

So was the governor promoting religion or just exercising his right to believe?

It's a fine line. American leaders have always proclaimed their piety, at least when it suits them. Most presidents have attended church. Most governors have led prayers and attended religious events. Our founding documents call upon the deity to guide and protect the Republic.

Perhaps Gov. Brownback stands out because he's made no bones about his Roman Catholic beliefs or his conservative approach to religion. He's an attractive target.

We're not here to argue for mixing church and state. School districts should not force students to pray, nor should the government support or promote the church, any church.

We're a free nation, though, and even the governor should be free to believe as he wishes.

He shares the First Amendment with the anti-religionists.

But can our leaders pray in public or declare their faith in God? They have since the beginning of the Republic.

Our Constitution is an imperfect document, and its meaning has shifted with time. Where it once shielded slavery and denied women the vote, today it does neither. Public prayer? Our leaders are allowed, but no one is compelled to agree with them. That's part of what freedom means.

— Steve Haynes



## Tragedy makes you think

I cried. I cried harder than I had in two years.

When I heard the news of that man, who I refuse to name in print on principle alone, who killed those children, I was quiet. I left work early and went home. I didn't turn on the news. I opened a beer and sat on the couch to think about it, and I cried. I cried so hard that it scared me, so hard that I had to tell myself to get a grip and just stop.

I didn't talk about it, read or watch anything more for the following weeks. But springing from the tragedy in Connecticut, through the wellspring of my heart and out my fingers is this, that I offer to you, my people, for lack of anything else to give.

Ours is a free society, a brave new world that inspires me, that I love, and that I cherish. And there are a few things I want to say about it.

The best defense against tyranny is a well-armed populace. Thomas Jefferson said that. But as my mother pointed out to me the Sunday before Christmas, Thomas Jefferson never thought that one of his people would take up arms and slaughter his children. There is a problem here, and it goes far deeper than gun control or gun rights. It goes deeper than our hospitals and mental health clinics.

We need our guns; they're important. They feed and protect us, not just from invaders, but also from each other. And we will always have our poor and our sick, and they will always need to be defended, too.

This may seem out of left field, but bear with me here: When the Industrial Revolution came along, something came with it that is known as a singularity. Increasingly, our human minds could not advance as fast as our technology,



### Newcomer's View

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and thus, our society as a whole collapsed for a brief period. An archduke was murdered, and suddenly we were in a war that consumed much of our world. These are the things that happen when we cannot understand or cope with our own rapid development: We freak out. We have to do something, anything to make it all make sense again, and for some reason — maybe because of our very nature — we often turn to violence.

I was 14 when the Columbine Massacre filled the news. I was 16 when the Sept. 11 attacks came. I've come to adulthood in the age of violence, under the umbrella of the age of information and within this all-consuming technological revolution. We live in strange times, but it goes deeper than that — we are living within a cultural singularity.

I don't know what the answer is. And quite frankly, I'm suspicious of those who claim they do. What I do know is this: It's time to question ourselves. If our lifestyle, if our values and freedoms and country now require the sacrifice and slaughter of innocents, then is the price too high?

I know that something, anything, and perhaps everything needs to change. We can't allow this to happen again, ever. I remember the first one. And I'll never be able to forget this one. It still makes me want to

cry, but crying isn't enough. Sending money isn't enough. Passing laws isn't even enough, lest we forget the law of unintended consequences.

I don't know the answer, but I know this: It must stop, and if I find a way — any way — to help make that happen, be it a kind deed or a march on the Capitol or just writing this right now, I'm going to do it.

We need our guns, yes, we do. And we will always be charged with the care (or lack thereof) of our mentally ill. How we reconcile these two needs and our own wants, fears and emotions is up to us.

Don't look to Washington to remove these problems. Look at yourself, and each other. Something needs to change. The real conversation needs to start now.

### From the Bible

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

— Galatians 2: 8-10

## Thank you to highway crews

It's weeks like last week that ought to make us appreciate the guys who keep the roads open and safe for travel, day or night, rain or snow: the state highway crews, troopers and deputies, firemen, tow-truck drivers and all the others who keep us moving and sometimes save us from ourselves.

Most of the time, we take them for granted. The only time we come in contact with a trooper might be when we're going a bit too fast. And highway crews, they're the guys with the orange cones and stop signs who hold us back, make us late for that appointment in the next town.

We haven't had much winter yet, but that's when these people really shine. State crews went to 12-hour shifts as the storm approached before Christmas, keeping the plows moving day and night until the roads were clear. Next day when the sun came out, they were dry.

Say what you will, but I have a lot of respect for people who can work that way, 12 hours on, 12 off, in the worst weather of the year, plowing icy roads in a howling storm where sometimes you can't see the road at all.

But they know there are people out there who depend on them, the ones stuck in the ditch, the ones hurt in icy spinouts, the ones who might be stuck if they don't keep plowing.

Troopers and tow-truck drivers, deputies and firemen all have to get out on the pavement to check the people stuck in the ditch, direct traffic, hook up chains, all the



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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time never knowing when the next driver might not stop in time, might go skidding out of control. It's no wonder they close the roads when things get bad.

This isn't just work; it's stress. It's dangerous.

Not that working out on the road is much easier in the summer. The sun is hot, safety rules make the work drag on and people don't slow down much just because you're out there in orange.

Flagging may look like the easiest job, but it's maybe the hardest. You're on your feet in the sun all day, with wind, dust, rain and traffic. And stress. Who knows if the woman barreling down on you is awake, or on the phone, or yelling at her kids, or putting on her makeup? Who knows if she sees the flag? Who knows if she's even going to stop?

Yeah, a lot of times it may not look like the crew is getting much done. And there're all those jokes about road crews; you know, "What's orange and sleeps three?"

The people who think these things up have never driven a plow alone at

night in a blizzard, or shoveled hot asphalt patch on a summer day, or stood and flagged traffic, safely, for hours on end.

They have nice office jobs, live in California maybe. It's OK. A lot of guys on the road crews have a sense of humor.

How about this? Next time you see a bunch of road workers — but only if it's safe to stop — you might just want to stop and say thanks. Tell 'em how much you appreciate what they do, day and night, winter and summer. Same for the trooper in your town or the deputy who lives down the block, your neighbor the volunteer fireman, the tow-truck guy who never seems to have a thing to do all day.

Not many people bother, you know. Most just drive on by or shake their fist at the delay. (How do they think roads get fixed, anyway?)

Heck, stop and talk to the guys, they might just show you some of those new shovels the state bought. You know, the ones that stand up by themselves so the crew can get some work done.

## Husband missed Christmas

My daughter Halley has been here for a few days. She came for Christmas and we've had a great time. Sorry Jim missed it.

He didn't miss it in the literal sense. He was physically here the entire time. But, cognitively, he's been gone.

It all started with a nasty, hacking cough he hadn't been able to shake for a couple of weeks. It was getting to the point where he couldn't sleep and he was getting worn down. The day before Christmas, he managed to see a doctor who prescribed an antibiotic and a high-powered cough medicine containing codeine.

His first dose was about 11 a.m. It's a good thing he was sitting down when he took it, otherwise he would have fallen down. When I say he was out, I don't just mean he dozed off. I mean, the lights were out and no one was home. Sometime during the night, he must have roused enough to take a second dose, but he didn't get the cap back on the bottle and poured the entire contents into his lap. Christmas Day he managed to stay awake just long enough to eat a few bites of dinner and then, right back to sleep. This continued until Thursday afternoon, when he managed to stay awake for a few hours.

When he's fully recovered, I'll tell him what a good time he missed.

Normally, Jim and I don't do Christmas presents. We like to give them, but neither one of us care that much about getting them.

Or so I thought. This year I discovered that I had actually accumulated about three presents for Jim. A pair of alpaca wool socks I picked up during my ladies club road trip in October, his usual pair of overalls and a nice, long-sleeved, cotton shirt with his preaching school's insignia embroidered on the pocket. Then to top it off, an old friend stopped in my office the week before Christmas with



### Out Back

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the offer of three window panels for a Model T. I jumped on the offer and wrapped them up, too.

I was acting pretty smug, thinking I had really pulled one over on Jim when I noticed a rather large, nicely wrapped box under the tree. It had my name on it with a hand-written sign, "Don't shake or tilt."

Christmas Day Jim wasn't feeling too good, but he feigned enthusiasm for his gifts.

I on the other hand was almost giddy. When I opened my present, I was flabbergasted. There was the most beautiful, bright yellow, up-right stand mixer I had ever seen. Years ago, I had talked myself out of wanting such a fine piece of kitchen machinery. But, secretly, I had always desired one. And now, I had one.

Oh, I know Jim may have had an ulterior motive for getting the mixer. After all, he will be the beneficiary of the culinary delights I will be expected to produce. But, that's OK. It'll be worth it.

Two of Halley's cousins (my brother Dick's boys) were in the territory for Christmas and she wanted to see them, so we made a quick trip to Dick and Donna's place for a visit.

Somehow the conversation got around to how long Jim and I have been married, and inevitably, the topic of our first date came up. I couldn't believe Sheldon had never heard the story, so I was giving him the highlights.

I set the whole story up. How it

was going to be a "sympathy" date, how it was on April Fool's Day and how, during our ride to a restaurant in a neighboring town, I kept saying, "I don't get involved. I don't make commitments. Let's just be friends."

When I got to the part where there was a lull in the conversation as Jim was searching for the right words, I said, "And then, there was a pregnant pause."

With a confused look, Sheldon said, "What's a pregnant pause?"

Halley said, "I'm not surprised you've never heard of it. The term refers to silence. Something the Kelley family knows nothing about."

His brother Kirk said, "Well, in theory, it's when no one is talking."

Halley added, "Some people actually don't mind silence."

Anyway, we all laughed so hard, I'm not sure I ever finished my story. But, I guess, Sheldon knows it all worked out because ... they lived happily ever after.

### In the U.S.A.

Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator. And change has its enemies.  
— Robert F. Kennedy  
Nov. 20, 1925 - June 6, 1968  
Senator from New York  
candidate for president

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